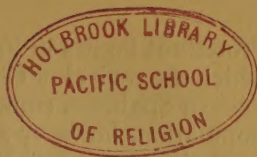


The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM



No. 97

SEPTEMBER 3RD, 1941

DEAR MEMBER,

The writer of the previous number of this News-Letter introduced herself in terms of apology which will serve at least equally well for the present writer: I shall therefore not attempt to amplify or vary what she said in her first paragraph, but accept it as an introduction for myself also.

THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION OF FRANCE

We know little of the situation in either occupied or unoccupied France ; and those of us who have French friends receive no news, or hardly more than that they are still alive. Our public preoccupation, also, is with the foreign policy of the Vichy government and its immediate consequences for us. Yet it is of very great importance, in the long run, that we should take every opportunity of informing ourselves about the domestic policy of that government, and of the changes taking place inside France. For the problem of France will be one of the most vital and difficult of all the post-war problems ; and we need to remind ourselves that the France which we shall have to get to know—after a period of isolation of the two countries from each other for which there is no parallel in history—may be different from the France which we knew up to fifteen months ago. For that reconstruction of understanding which will be essential, we shall need all our powers of imagination, sympathy and tolerance ; and also all the information about the steps in France's development that we can meanwhile obtain. The article in *The Times* of August 14th, therefore, meagre as it is, deserves our careful attention.

As for the abolition of political parties, we know well that there were formerly far too many for parliamentary government to be anything but a tedious farce ; and we know how prevalent was political corruption and venality. As for the abolition of Free Masonry, we must remember that the Grand Orient was a very different affair from Free Masonry as known in Britain—I have always understood that relations between the two bodies were broken off long ago. On the other hand, the abolition of secret societies seems to have come rather late, for it arouses our recollection of the fact that some of the most dangerous of these, in the years before the war, were freely said to have been abetted and subsidised by Germany, if not even created by German machinations. What gives us the gravest anxiety, is the statement (in *The Times* article cited) that "Jews have been given a special status, based on the laws of Nuremberg, which makes their condition little better than that of bondsmen." Anti-semitism there has always been, among the parties of the extreme Right : but it was a very different thing, as a symptom of the disorder of French society and politics for the last hundred and fifty years, from what it is when it takes its place as a principle of reconstruction. If this is what is happening, we can only hope that there has been, or that there will be, some organised protest against such injustice, by the French ecclesiastical hierarchy : unless we are also optimistic enough to hope that these measures are only taken under the strongest pressure from Germany, and that no French government, once that government was master in its own house, would enforce such measures or keep them on its statutes. But unless the French Church, and the

Protestant bodies in France rise to protest, we must feel serious doubts about the way in which the revival of Christian France, advertised from Vichy, is to be carried out.

In Spain—a country which I do not know—it may be that the vast majority of the population, however anti-clerical, is Christian and Catholic at heart. France has had a very different story. We may deplore the French Revolution, but we must accept it as a fact. In no European country is the gulf between the Christian and the non-Christian more acute ; a large part of the population is the product of four generations of apostasy, and is therefore not to be Christianized over night or made to conform to behaviour the principles of which it denies. What four generations have destroyed cannot in one generation be recreated ; and the unity which France so sorely needs will not be achieved by oppression.

The words which I have used will, I hope, come with more force from one who has never been an admirer of Republican government in France. The device *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* is only the memorial of the time of revolution : *Famille, Travail, Patrie* has more permanent value. But to substitute the second for the first is to go further than merely to call attention to equal, or even to higher values : it is by implication the denial and repudiation of the first. It suggests the danger of a reaction which might be as bad, or worse than that from which it reacts. To have affirmed Liberty, Equality, Fraternity in that way was, I think, unfortunate : but to repudiate them in this way is at least an equal error. Every country needs a strong government ; it is probable that France in her present condition can only be ruled by an autocratic government ; but at no time can an autocratic government be good for France unless it has the wisdom and prescience to recognise limits to autocracy. No one who knows and loves France can wish to see her revert to the condition of the twenty years between the wars: but reactionary excesses might foment a counter-reaction to a condition equally deplorable.

I am not suggesting that we have enough information yet to judge the domestic and cultural policy of the present government of unoccupied France : we have merely enough to be apprehensive, and to make it imperative for us to follow the progress of this policy as well as conditions of communication permit. It is especially important that the Christian public here should concern itself with the methods of a government which professes Christianity, and which proclaims the ideal of a Christian France. For we have the same ideal for Britain, and can surely profit by studying the success or failure of other methods than our own.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN BRITAIN

The Editor has already called attention (in No. 94) to the statement *Why Christian Education Matters* and has made some comment on it. I believe, however, that the questions I have just raised provide a context in which some fresh issues may be raised. When any reform is proposed, it is only common sense to consider its possible risks. The zeal of those who favour any particular change may lead them to confuse a proper caution with wilful obstruction or destructive scepticism, and to be impatient with those who point out dangers. I hope that no such conclusion will be drawn in the present instance. The goal, a Christian Britain, is our common goal, and if we are apprehensive of methods to be employed in France, we should none the less be critical of our own. The question which I wish to put is one which I raise in the interests of every denomination. It is recognised that except in denominational schools (the problems of which do not come within the scope of the proposals) the religious instructions must be confined to what all, or at least the best recognised, Christian groups can accept. Before we give *carte blanche* to the educational authorities to introduce into schools a new syllabus of “religious knowledge”—and I take it that this term includes something more dogmatic than a knowledge of religious history or of those principles of morals upon which all Christians agree, important as these departments are—we might consider how this teaching is to be completed by the specific instruction which will make the child not merely a “Christian” in the abstract, but a

member of the Church of Rome, the Church of England or that of Scotland, a Methodist, a Congregationalist, a Baptist, or a member of some other communion. For unless we can effect this conjunction there is a danger of producing a generation of so-called Christians with no particular church connexions at all. By comparison with the present situation, and with the tendencies of our time, this possibility may appear the reverse of a calamity ; and no one would be so uncharitable as to deny that an individual with no church connexion can yet be, in a sense, a Christian. But if you have a nation, or a vast majority, of such persons, the results might be as disastrous as apostasy.

For we owe an obligation, each of us to our particular church, to preserve its doctrine entire and undefiled : an obligation no less serious than our obligation to bring light to those who walk in darkness and who have, in effect, no opportunity of knowing enough about the Christian Faith even to reject it. That the moderate measures proposed should be put into effect seems highly desirable : but let us not pretend, or allow it to be believed, that they are sufficient to provide a " truly Christian Britain." What we have to guard against is that such reforms should result in a kind of National Christianity, the vagaries of which would be free from the control of any theological authority. Nor are we always aware that our modest efforts may be regarded with suspicion, and our lack of clarity of thought be imputed as disingenuousness—as the attempt of a dominant section of society to confirm its domination. For some of the recommendations made in the leaflet seem oddly inadequate to the implications of the statement (which I believe to be true) made in the conclusion : " For the Christian there is no choice. Education is from top to bottom religious, or it is not education."

CHRISTIAN AND NATURAL VIRTUES

It is often in my mind that we may tend to make the Christian compromise with the world—for some compromise must be made—on the wrong ground. We may go too far on the assumption that a little Christianity all round is more important than the full Christian life on the part of a few—as if the operation of the leaven on the lump could be performed once for all, after which we would have no need for leaven. It is not irrelevant or without significance, I think, that there are signs of a similar attitude with regard to culture and the arts : that a degree of refinement of manners and sensibility which cannot be attained by all, is taken to be superfluous and anti-social ; and that works of art which cannot be enjoyed by all are to be condemned—even though there is evidence that popular art is continually fertilised and revived from above. (I would instance poster art and the recent *Fantasia* of Mr. Disney.) This form of egalitarianism would be destructive of either culture or Christianity. Full Christian virtue cannot exist without full Christian belief : but there is natural virtue about which Christian and non-Christian can agree.

That natural virtue should be presented as Christian virtue has unfortunate consequences in both directions. On the one hand the specifically Christian virtues get overlooked ; and on the other hand, when standards of behaviour which should be accepted by all are put forward as Christian, they may appear to those who are not Christians to have no application to themselves. This country, like some others, has suffered grievously already by the decline of Christian belief and conduct : but, looking back at the twenty years between wars, one is inclined to assert that there were lapses, not only of Christianity, but of common social and personal virtues without which no society, Christian or not, can survive. There is, for instance, nothing particularly Christian about the capacity for responsible leadership in public life.

Amongst the natural virtues the place of which has not been settled I should include *patriotism*. I speak of it as being fundamentally a virtue, though obviously it can easily pass into the vices of nationalism, imperialism in the bad sense, collective pride and collective cupidity : it can, furthermore, be a cloak for individual or sectional selfishness. These associations are so patent that the word itself seems to have, for many people,

attached to itself suspicion and odium—though the adjective “unpatriotic” has never, so far as I know, acquired any but a strongly condemnatory meaning. There is another reason why we are shy of the word, in this country, and that is a question of good manners : we feel it to be a quality which is better taken for granted, and not talked about—though this particular reticence may be partly the outcome of more than a century of success and security. Yet it is a permanent feeling, which for better as well as worse cannot be exorcised : to ignore it, in our schemes for the federation of the world, as well as for our enemies to ignore it in their schemes of domination, is to risk eventual explosions. It includes the attachment to natural as well as to constructed surroundings, to place as well as to people, to the past as well as to the future; the attachment of a people to its own culture, and to its ability to make that specific and voluntary contribution to Christendom and to the world. In his letter of August 20th the Editor referred to Professor Carr’s *The Future of Nations* as suggesting that the solution of the problems of nationality can be found in “the recognition of different, but not incompatible loyalties.” Patriotism is a loyalty which requires to be balanced by other loyalties. One has, on the personal level, an attachment to people of one’s own sort, among other nationalities : if one has them, to foreign friends ; if one is a man of science or of art or of scholarship, to one’s colleagues in foreign countries. There is the wider loyalty to justice. And finally, there is for the Christian the greatest and most binding of loyalties, which, like the loyalty to justice but with still greater authority, can bring him into conflict with the conception of patriotism prevailing at the moment. But higher loyalty does not supersede patriotism, but refines it : and the patriotism of a Christian should be something finer than that of a non-Christian, yet remain a common virtue shared with him. To speak of this subject at all, at a time when so much heroic self-sacrifice has manifested itself, may seem at first an impertinence ; but I am not exhorting people to be more patriotic, but suggesting that we might think about the place of patriotism in the Christian life.

APOLOGY

It is a great temptation, to anyone called in to write the Christian News-Letter (I would not say to “edit” it) for one week, to produce what is really a Supplement and pretend that it is a Letter. But I had no “news” upon which I felt myself especially qualified to pronounce : and if this contribution differs from a Supplement only in being more loosely constructed, and following my own train of thought from one subject to another, I can only say that I have anticipated this particular criticism.

Yours sincerely,

P. S. Eliot

Subscriptions—The rate of subscription to the News-Letter is 12s. 6d. (\$3.0 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year, and 6s. 6d. (\$1.50 in U.S.A. and Canada) for six months. Back numbers—4d. each, 1s. 2d. for 6, 1s. 11d. for 12 copies. Post free.

Bound Volumes—Volume I (Nos. 0-26), Volume II (Nos. 27-52), Volume III (Nos. 53-78). Uniformly bound in green cloth with gold lettering and index. 8s. 6d. each, post free.

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, ARLOSH HALL, MANSFIELD ROAD, OXFORD.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life and printed by the Kemp Hall Press, Ltd., in the City of Oxford.